

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 19377

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PFOR, TH

SUBJECT: PHAITHUN KHRUAKAEO, NEW SAP MEMBER

REF: BANGKOK, 17838, 18155

SUMMARY: DR. PHAITHUN KHRUAKAEO, MP FROM LAMPANG AND CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, (HFRC) ANNOUNCED ON JUNE 24 THAT HE WAS DISSOLVING THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT PARTY AND JOINING THE SOCIAL ACTION PARTY, (SAP). EMBASSY BELIEVES HE JOINED SAP MAINLY FOR FINANCIAL REASONS. DR. PHAITHUN HAS OONG BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIALIST PARTIES, AND CRITICAL OF US POLICY. AS A MEMBER OF SAP, EMBASSY BELIEVES HE CAN USE CHAIRMANSHIP OF HFRC MORE EFFECTIVELY TO ATTACK THE GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS THE U.S. HE IS THE FIRST MP SINCE THE APRIL 4 ELECTIONS TO SWITCH PARTIES BUT PROBABLY NOT THE LAST. END SUMMARY.

1. ON JUNE 24 DR. PHAITHUN KHRUAKAEO, MP FROM LAMPANG AND LEADER OF THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT PARTY (UDF), ANNOUNCED THAT HE WAS

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DISSOLVING THE UDF AND JOINING THE SOCIAL ACTION

PARTY -0). BUNCHU ROTCHANASATHIAN, SAP DEPUTY LEADER, WHO WELCOMED PHAITHUN INTO THE PARTY, ANNOUNCED THAT PHAITHUN WOULD BECOME AN ADVISOR TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF SAP.

2. CHAMNIAN HEMARAT, ADMINISTRATIVE CHIEF OF SAP, TOLD POLOFF THAT BUNCHU, AN OLD FRIEND OF PHAITHUN'S WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN BRINGING HIM INTO SAP. CHAMNIAN SAID BOTH SIDES WERE INTERESTED IN PHAITHUN JOINING SAP. HOWEVER, SOURCES AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TOLD THE EMBASSY'S CHIEF POLITICAL ASSISTANT THAT PHAITHUN INITIATED THE REQUEST TO JOIN SAP THROUGH BUNTHENG THONGSAWAT, A FELLOW MP FROM LAMPANG AND DEPUTY LEADER OF SAP. THE REASON PUT FORTH FOR JOINING SAP WAS BUNCHU'S ASSURANCE THAT SAP WOULD HELP PHAITHUN WITH THE MILLION BAHT DEBT THAT HE INCURRED DURING THE APRIL 4 ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

3. PHAITHUN IS OF MORE THAN PASSING INTEREST BECAUSE HE IS THE CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE (HFRC). PHAITHUN, THE SOLE MEMBER OF HIS PARTY TO BE ELECTED IN THE APRIL 4 ELECTIONS, HAS USED THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THIS COMMITTEE TO GAIN PUBLICITY FOR HIMSELF AND HIS VIEWS, ONE OF THE FEW OPPOSITION MP'S WHO HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO SO. HE LED MEMBERS OF THE HFRC ON WELL-PUBLICIZED TRIPS TO SOUTH IN THE WAKE OF THE BETONG DEMONSTRATIONS OF MAY AND TO LAOS IN JUNE. (NEITHER OF THE TRIPS PRODUCED ANY CONCRETE RESULTS.)

4. HE HAS ALSO COME OUT STRONGLY AGAINST RETENTION OF ANY RESIDUAL US PRESENCE IN THAILAND. HE ACCUSED THE US OF STIRRING UP THE MILITARY AND RIGHTWING GROUPS TO PRESSURE THE GOVERNMENT TO REVERSE ITS DECISION ON RAMASUN. IN THE LATEST ISSUE OF CHATURAT, A LEFT WING THAI LANGUAGE MAGAZINE, HE ACCUSED THE US OF BEING PRO-DICTATORSHIP AND ANTI-DEMOCRATIC. HE ALSO GRATUITIOUSLY INSULTED AMBASSADOR WHITEHOUSE BY CALLING HIM "A STRANGE

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ANIMAL...WHO SHOULD BE SENT TO A RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR STUDY".

5. PHAITHUN HOWEVER, DOES NOT HAVE FREE REIN IN THE HFRC. HE WAS ELECTED CHAIRMAN ONLY BECAUSE OF DISSENSION AMONG DEMOCRAT MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON WHO SHOULD BE CHAIRMAN AND A BREADDOWN IN THE FUNCTIONING OF THE COALITION'S COORDINATING

COMMITTEE. THE COALITION GOVERNMENT HAS A FIRM MAJORITY IN THE COMMITTEE. SEVERAL MPS ON THE HFRC TOLD EMBPOL ASSISTANT THAT THEY WERE UNHAPPY WITH PHAITHUN'S PERFORMANCE AS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN. THEY WARNED HIM TO DESIST FROM ISSUING PERSONAL STATEMENTS AS COMMITTEE STATEMENTS. THEY ALSO SAID THAT THERE WAS SOME TALK OF UNSEATING PHAITHUN AND ELECTING A NEW CHAIRMAN.

6. PHAITHUN HAS BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIALIST PARTIES SINCE HE FIRST ENTERED POLITICS IN THE 1968 ELECTION AS THE LEADER OF THE DEMOCRATIC FRONT PARTY (DFP). HIS PARTY WON 6 SEATS. SOON AFTER THE ELECTIONS, HOWEVER, 5 OF THE MPS BROKE AWAY FROM THE DFP TO FORM THE SOCIAL DEMOCRAT PARTY, THE PRECURSOR OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF THAILAND. IN THE JANUARY 26, 1975 ELECTIONS HE RAN UNDER THE SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT PARTY BANNER AND LOST.

7. IN THE PAST, AS NOW, PHAITHUN WAS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF THE US IN HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS. HOWEVER, IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH EMBOFFS, PHAITHUN HAS MAINTAINED THAT HE IS NOT ANTI-AMERICAN. IN VARIOUS REPORTS SINCE 1968, EMBOFFS DESCRIBED HIM AS A SHREWD, VERY OPPORTUNISTIC POLITICIAN, SOMEWHAT LEFT OF CENTER BUT NOT A DOCTRINAIRE LEFTIST. HE HAS ALWAYS BEEN FRIENDLY IN HIS PERSONAL CONTACTS WITH AMERICANS.

8. EMBASSY HAS UNSUBSTANTIATED REPORTS THAT PHAITHUN RECEIVED FINANCING FOR HIS MINING VENTURE
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FROM THE USSR AND BOUGHT EQUIPMENT FROM THE RUSSIANS AT A HIGHER PRICE THAN HE WOULD HAVE HAD TO PAY FOR COMPARABLE JAPANESE OR EUROPEAN EQUIPMENT. PHAITHUN HAS LONG CALLED FOR CLOSER TIES WITH COMMUNIST COUNTRIES AND REPORTEDLY WAS EVERJOYED WHEN TAIWAN WAS OUSTED FROM THE UNITED NATIONS IN OCTOBER 1971.

9. COMMENT: PHAITHUN IS THE FIRST MP SINCE THE APRIL 4 ELECTIONS TO SWITCH PARTIES. HE MAY NOT BE THE LAST. THE PEOPLE'S FORCE PARTY (PFP) IS IN TROUBLE BECAUSE OF ITS CONNECTION WITH THE THIPCHAROEN CASE (SEE REFTELS). THERE ARE STRONG INDICATIONS THAT THE 3 PFP MP'S WILL JOIN OTHER PARTIES. SAP'S ACCEPTANCE OF PHAITHUN ILLUSTRATES

ITS WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT MP'S OF AL OST ANY
STRIPE TO BOLSTER ITS POSITION FOR THE NEXT
OPPORTUNITY TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT.

10. PHAITHUN HAS PROVEN HIS ABILITY TO ATTRACT
PUBLICITY.; AS A MEMBERF OF THE LARGEST
OPPOSITION PARTY, PHAITHUN CAN NOW USE THE CHAIR-
MANSHIP OF THE HFRC WITH MORE AUTHORITY TO
QUESTION, PROBERAND ATTACK THE GOVERNQMENT'S
FOREIGN POLICY. IF PAST HISTORY IS ANY QUIDE,
PHAITHUN WILL ALSO ATTACK THE U.S. WHENEVER
AN ANTI-US STATEMENT WILL GAIN HIM PUBLICITY.
WHITEHOUSE

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